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FM AMEMBASSY BAKU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0921
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES PRIORITY
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 3296
RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1288
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAKU 000212

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CARC, DRL (WSILVERMAN)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/18/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: REFERENDUM SITREP #1

Classified By: Political-Economic Counselor Robert Garverick, for reasons 1.4 b and d

11. (C) Azerbaijan's polling stations opened largely on time (08:00 local time) on March 18, with observers noting an orderly process with minimal technical violations or issues, and very high voter turnout with in the first hour. As of 13:00 Baku time, there were no reports of violence or widespread demonstrations. Voting in the referendum on 29 amendments to the Constitution will take place until 19:00, when polling stations will close and counting will begin. Embassy staff, divided into 9 teams, are visiting polling stations in Baku and Azerbaijan's regions, working separately, but in cooperation with other European embassies' observer teams. All are accounted for and providing updates on voting day activities to Embassy staff in Baku.

12. (C) Voting, for the most part, seems to be taking place in an orderly way. Accusations of meddling in the referendum process, however, began the day before the voting began. The opposition Popular Front Party reported that their representative in Ganja (Azerbaijan's second largest city) was detained and questioned for several hours by police on the evening of March 16 while the representative was legally putting up anti-referendum signs. The opposition Musavat party reported that Yadigar Sadikov, head of the Lankaran branch of the party, was dismissed from his position as a professor of history at Lankaran State University due to his anti-referendum activities. Additionally, Embosffs have learned that retirees have received their pension checks early this month and with a little extra money included, supposedly in the spirit of the upcoming Novruz holiday. Some observers have suggested that the early release of transfer checks is tied to today's voting.

13. (C) Embassy observer teams in all regions report an organized effort to bolster voter turnout. In some locations voters are brought in groups, the leader of which instructs the voters what to do. In two locations buses were seen transporting voters, who were let out in small groups to vote in a polling station. One observer noticed the same two young women voting twice. In general, voters seem to be confused about the large number of questions on the ballot and occasionally ask the election officials for help. These officials reply that the voters should vote yes on everything, according to eye witnesses.

14. (SBU) The GOAJ reports that over 48,000 Azerbaijani citizens and 170 foreign citizens have been registered to observe the referendum. The UK Embassy has eight teams across the country, and reports that while Baku seems well

organized, their team in Ganja saw ballot stuffing and their team in Guba was turned away from one polling station. The Norwegian Embassy has five teams, and their team in Sumgayit also reports an organized effort to increase turnout and election officials interfering in voter decisions. Domestic observers, who may number as many as 40,000, seem to be either members of the ruling New Azerbaijan Party, or do not know what organization they represent.

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